

THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 1875

## SMITH'S "ASSYRIAN DISCOVERIES"

*Assyrian Discoveries: an Account of Explorations and Discoveries on the site of Nineveh, during 1873 and 1874.* By George Smith, of the Department of Oriental Antiquities, British Museum. With Illustrations. (London: Sampson Low and Co., 1875.)

JUDGING from the marvellous discoveries made within so short a time in the valley of the Euphrates and Tigris, Assyriology promises to be one of the most extensive as well as the most important auxiliaries to the reconstruction of ancient mythology, history, and philology. It is within the memory of the present generation that M. Botta, the French Consul at Mosul, first began the excavations of the buried cities of Assyria, and we can still remember the enthusiasm and also the incredulity with which Europe received the tidings that this *savant* had actually discovered at Khorsabad, in 1842, the long-lost palaces built by Sargon, about B.C. 722-705, exhibiting one of the most perfect Assyrian buildings and a most excellent specimen of royal architecture. Mr. Layard, who began his excavations as soon as M. Botta carried off his trophies to France (1845), astonished Europe with the still greater discoveries, both at Nineveh and in Babylonia. The researches thus started were continued, especially in Babylonia, by Rawlinson, Rassam, Loftus, and Taylor, and the British Museum now exhibits the remarkable treasures of Assyrian art, science, and literature, which crowned the labours of our explorers.

With the study of these records Mr. George Smith has been engaged for the last ten years; and since 1866 he has periodically published some of the discoveries he made among the fragments of the terra cotta inscriptions deposited in the British Museum. His most startling discovery, however, he communicated in a paper read before the Society of Biblical Archæology, December 3, 1872, which gives the Chaldean account of the Deluge, and which he deciphered on the tablets of the Assyrian library discovered by Layard. In consequence of the great interest excited by these finds, the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph* placed a thousand guineas at Mr. Smith's disposal, to undertake fresh researches at Nineveh. It was no easy task for him to go over the same ground and reopen trenches in the same localities so successfully worked by his predecessors. Still, the field of research is so extensive, and the hidden palaces are so numerous, that even now far greater treasures may be exhumed than those which have already been reclaimed by the French and English explorers. This will readily be seen from a perusal of Mr. Smith's work which gives the results of his expedition, and from the success he achieved, though his time was limited, and his difficulties were great. In less than four months, excavations on the sites of Kouyunjik and Nimroud, he found over 3,000 inscriptions and fragments of inscriptions, besides many other objects of antiquity. The great object for which Mr. Smith undertook this expedition, namely, to recover, if possible, some of the missing portions of the inscribed terra cotta tablets he had deciphered in the British

Museum, was thoroughly achieved. Among the discoveries he made at Kouyunjik is a veritable fragment containing the greater portion of seventeen lines of inscription which belong to the first column of the Chaldean account of the Deluge, completing the only place where there was a serious lacuna in the story.

The limits of this notice will only permit us to give a very brief summary of the Izdubar legends. Izdubar, the hero of these legends, is a giant who has a court, a seer or astrologer, and officers. Having lost his seer, and being unable to replace him, he determines to seek counsel of Hasisadra, the sage who escaped the deluge. After protracted wanderings through fabulous regions, he at last alights upon Hasisadra and his wife, and inquires of the sage how he became immortal. The sage thereupon tells Izdubar the story of the flood and of the vessel which he built according to the directions of Hea to save himself and his belongings from the universal deluge which the gods brought upon the earth to destroy the human family because of the wickedness of the children of men. This deluge lasted six days, and on the seventh day the storm ceased, when the vessel was stranded for seven days on the mountains of Nizir. At the end of the second hexahemerion, Hasisadra sent forth some birds to ascertain the state of the ground, the description of which we must give in the language of the legend:—

"On the seventh day in the course of it  
I sent forth a dove and it left. The dove went and turned,  
and  
A resting-place it did not find, and it returned.  
I sent forth a swallow and it left. The swallow went and  
turned, and  
A resting-place it did not find, and it returned.  
I sent forth a raven and it left.  
The raven went, and the corpses on the water it saw, and  
It did eat, it swam, and wandered away, and did not return.  
I sent the animals forth to the four winds, I poured out a  
libation,  
I built an altar on the peak of the mountain,  
By sevens herbs I cut,  
At the bottom of them I placed reeds, pines, and singar.  
The gods collected at its burning, the gods collected at its  
good burning:  
The gods like flies over the sacrifice gathered."

A careful examination of this legend, which, according to Mr. Smith, is at the latest more than two thousand years before the Christian era, will show the impartial student that he has here the polytheistic prototype of the legend of which the biblical story is a monotheistic redaction. Indeed, Mr. Smith has already announced that he has also discovered the legends of the Creation, the building of the Tower of Babel, &c. A striking illustration of how the Assyrian discoveries will materially contribute to a scientific understanding of ancient mythology may be seen in the legend of "The Descent of Ishtar into Hades."

The goddess Ishtar, *i.e.* Venus, daughter of the Moon, determines to visit "the land from which there is no return." On her arrival at the gate she demands admittance, threatening that if refused she would assault the door and raise the dead to devour the living. After consulting the goddess of the nether regions, the porter admits Ishtar, who, on entering, is, by the command of the Queen of Hades, punished in the same manner as those wives are who have been unfaithful to their husbands. At each of the seven gates of Hades she is stripped of some of her

ornaments and apparel, till at last she is 'divested of everything. Her detention, however, in the lower regions caused the greatest disorders upon the earth, so much so that her parents, the Sun and Moon, weepingly exclaim, "Since the time that Mother Ishtar descended into Hades the bull has not sought the cow, nor the male of any animal the female." To avoid the threatened extinction of life, Ishtar has her jewels returned and is restored to heaven.

The design of this legend, as read on the broken Assyrian tablets, is not to be made out. In the Talmud, however, where the same legend is recorded in the recast form of the monotheistic crucible, the import of it becomes perfectly clear. After the restoration of the second Temple, we are told that the men of the Great Synagogue, headed by Ezra and Nehemiah, made every effort to wean the people from polytheism and from the orgies practised in connection with the worship of idols. To this end the saints prayed that God might deliver into their hands the demon of sexual lust. In vain did a prophetic voice warn them that if their prayer were granted all nature would at once become stationary, and then life would become extinct. The zeal of the pious would not listen to the utterance, and the demon had to be delivered into their hands. For three days they kept him in prison and in chains, but after the three days no fresh-laid egg could be got in the land, and they had therefore to liberate the demon, depriving him, however, of the power to excite lust in the human breast for the first degrees of consanguinity (*Yoma* 69b: *Sanhedrin* 60a: *Yalkut* on *Nehemiah*, § 1071). The moral of the Ishtar legend thus becomes apparent, and we see how important the materials are which these Assyrian discoveries yield for the study of comparative mythology.

As to the importance of these cuneiform records to philology, we can only illustrate it by one example. The Hebrew expression עשתי which, when joined with a number denoting ten, makes the combined phrase denote eleven, has caused the greatest difficulty to Semitic scholars from the time when the first Hebrew lexicon was compiled to the present day. Such great authorities as Ibn Ezra (A.D. 1088—1176), and Kimchi (A.D. 1160—1235), take it to denote *thought*, and say that the phrase in question literally denotes "ten which are counted upon the fingers and one in thought," or, as Simonis, who espouses this notion, explains it, "*Cogitationes ultra decem*, i.e., *numerus cogitatione sive mente concipiendus cum prae cedentes numeri ad digitos numerarentur*." To which Gesenius in his Lexicon adds, "This is unsatisfactory enough, though a better solution is still wanting." Now, from the cuneiform we learn that עשתן *istin* is the ordinary expression for *one*, thus yielding the long-wished-for solution of this difficult word.

Amongst the other discoveries which Mr. Smith made and which he classifies under "Foreign Inscriptions," are several Phœnician. The first of these, according to our explorer, is a contract of sale, and probably belongs to the seventh century B.C. "The Phœnician legend is beautifully incised along the edge of the tablet, and is very sharp and clear. Transcribed into Hebrew letters it reads—

דנת . אלמלך . זי . ארק . טמע  
The sale by Almalek of the cultivated field.

The words are divided by dots, and the meaning of the inscription is clear." We, however, question whether "the meaning is clear." It is greatly to be regretted that Mr. Smith did not figure this inscription as he has done in the case of far less interesting subjects. It is important to palæography, inasmuch as it confirms the testimony of the famous Moabite inscription that at the earliest period of Semitic writing the words were not only written separately but were divided by dots, and in this respect essentially differ from the earliest Greek inscriptions. Our reasons for doubting the correctness of Mr. Smith's transliteration are, that (1) we do not remember that דנת signifies *sale*; and (2) the demonstrative pronoun has not in Phœnician the scriptio plena Yod, but is simply י, especially in ancient Phœnician. Nor do we think Mr. Smith's rendering of טמע by *cultivated happy*. The word in question is better translated *undulating*.

We have said enough to show the extreme importance of Mr. Smith's discoveries. Much, however, still remains to be done, and Mr. Smith calculates that no less than 20,000 fragments of this valuable collection of terra cotta inscriptions, portions of which are in the British Museum and at the Louvre, still lie buried at Kouyunjik. It would require 5,000*l.* and three years' work to recover these treasures. Mr. Smith is perfectly willing to undertake the labour of systematic excavations, and we earnestly trust that the nation, either independently of, or through the Government and the Trustees of the British Museum, will be as ready to furnish this comparatively small sum.

#### BANCROFT'S "NATIVE RACES OF THE PACIFIC STATES"

*The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America.*  
By H. H. Bancroft. Vol. I. Wild Tribes. (London: Longmans and Co.)

IT is curious that the comparatively little known Pacific side of North America should have had its ethnology collected and digested, while this task has not been performed for the more familiar Atlantic side. Schoolcraft's great work, principally devoted to the Indians east of the Rocky Mountains, is quite of different character, containing a great amount of original information, but no systematic survey of all that is known. Bancroft's plan, to judge from the present volume, is to compile only, but to compile the substance of the whole existing literature. His success has been remarkable, and his work will be of the greatest service to ethnologists, under one condition. Travellers' accounts of savages are meagre enough already, but abstracts of them shrink almost to the bones. Therefore Mr. Bancroft's book should be used as a skeleton chart to guide inquirers to the original authorities, but should not be treated as making such reference unnecessary.

The physical descriptions of the races of Pacific America, from the Arctic Circle almost to the Equator, are carefully drawn up, though the want of engravings makes it less easy to give precise ideas of them. There are certainly two varieties of man in the district. One is the Eskimo, with their fair complexion, thick-set robust make, and low stature (not, however, so stunted on the Pacific side as in Greenland). The other is the North American Indian, with skin of more or less deep brown, slighter build, and